Ask yourself this: Might it be possible to transform the entire world into an invisible, Nazi style terror camp, right before our eyes?

Absolute Power

The order of terror : the concentration camp, by Sofsky, Wolfgang

ABSOLUTE POWER is a power structure *sui generis*. The concentration camp cannot be integrated into the history of despotism, slavery, or modern discipline. Organized terror cannot be mapped onto a continuum of domination. The differences are not gradual, staggered along a cline of coercion, but fundamental. To describe the power system operative in the concentration camps using the customary conceptions of social power is a category mistake. This historical and anthropological rupture in the history of power calls for a radical shift in the theoretical point of departure. Even a cursory look at other forms of power reveals essential differences.

In despotism, one individual directs all according to his or her own arbitrary will and caprice, unencumbered by bonds to law or considerations of justice. Each one is afraid of everyone else. Tyranny is a desert of bondage. It knows neither social classes nor hierarchies. Except for the auxiliary troops of the despot, it lacks any middle-level authority that might structure the field between the sovereign and the serially structured mass. Despotism atomizes society; it levels all differences until equality is total: the equality of universal powerlessness. Terror is meant to intimidate, to crush resistance, to spread fear. It comes to an end when the last opponent has been eliminated and the peace of the grave holds dominion. Violence, however, remains an instrument of suppression, a means to an end. Once that end has been reached and the regime's power consolidated, despotisms make do with arbitrary, lawless rule, shifting pragmatically among punishment, incentive, and reward.

Social rule is characterized by an abiding willingness to obey, to submit. Subservient subjects make the command the maxim of their actions. They follow it because it is an order. They obey because they wish to and they accept subordination because they have a certain interest in obedient compliance. Stable rule can rest assured that those dominated put their own interests aside, even considering them to a certain extent unjustified, and do so quite apart from the concrete content of any specific order. Obedience is a general willingness always to do what is demanded. The motives for this "coerced voluntariness" may change. They can be rooted in obtuse habituation or be based on an insight into the threat of potential disadvantages, on affective ties to authority or the belief in the legitimacy of the social order. But obedience is always a social act. Social reciprocity is preserved. Unlike

tyranny, social domination does not transform society into a serially ordered mass; rather, it holds society together by the glue of coordinated obeisance. It itself creates and consolidates social bonds.

Punitive power wishes to realize its goals and interests against reluctance and resistance. It defines alternative paths of action and imposes sanctions if a person does not decide to follow the prescribed direction. It steers action by the threat of penalties, and by obligating itself to enact such penalties if need be.’ This has nothing in common with arbitrary terror. Punitive power is precisely the opposite. It guides the social future, letting individuals know what they can expect. If one submits, there is no penalty; if one is recalcitrant, one must fear the consequences. Punitive power guides action by the instrument of fear, but always leaves open the door to obedience. It operates with deterrence, not terror. It coerces a person’s will in the desired direction, but does not seek to break that will. It directs action, but does not destroy it.

Disciplinary power remolds human beings by subjecting them to constant control.‘ It has no need to make an example of someone to serve as a warning to others. Instead, it employs an extensive repertoire of subtle techniques of power that block the emergence of any kind of resistance. Unceasingly, it supervises spatiality, organizes temporal sequences, documents deviations, and inculcates normality. It examines progress, ordering it hierarchially, ultimately arranging disciplined individuals into smoothly functioning social machines. Total institutions are the parade grounds of disciplinary power, but that power’s goal is the totally disciplined individual who obeys schematically, beyond conscious awareness. Discipline is a power, devoid of a center, that has lodged in the brain of the obedient. It requires neither arbitrariness nor violence. It is a silent power that has become habitus (attitudinal disposition), without chains of iron and steel, without barbed wire.

Absolute power as realized in the concentration camp differs from all this. Here, power does not shed its shackles until after all opponents have long since been vanquished. It does not forgo violence, but liberates it from all inhibitions and impediments, intensifying it by organization. Where the terror of tyranny ends, it begins. Absolute power is not bent on achieving blind obedience or discipline, but desires to generate a universe of total uncertainty, one in which submissiveness is no shield against even worse outcomes. It forces its victims together into an aggregate, a mass; it stirs up differences and erects a social structure marked by extreme contrasts. It uses various procedures for total control—not for the development of individual self-discipline, but as instruments of quotidian harassment, of daily cruelty. Terror dissolves the link between transgression and punitive sanction. It requires neither occasions nor reasons, and has no interest in obligating itself by threat. Absolute power goes on a rampage whenever it so desires. It does not wish to limit freedom, but to destroy it. It does not seek to guide action, but to demolish it. It drains human beings, depleting them by labor both useful and senseless. It sets economic goals from which it then breaks free. It liberates itself from ideological convictions after first having organized camp society in accordance with its ideological model of social classes. Even killing, that final reference point of all power, is not sufficient. Absolute power transforms the universal structures of human relatedness to the world: space and time, social relations, the connection with work, the relation to the self. It seizes on various elements and methods of traditional forms of power, combining and intensifying them, while casting off their instrumentality. In this way, it becomes a form of power of a distinctive, singular kind.’ In order to interpret the concentration camp as a specifically new type of modern power, it is necessary to take a more detailed look at the most salient characteristic features of absolute power.

First, absolute power is organized power. It relies for support not just on a monopoly of military means of violence, but on a stable framework of social structures. The sources of camp power were terror and organization, not legitimacy or habit. It locked individuals into a spatial system of zones and grids, shaping their movements. It steered social time, erected a social structure, and organized work, violence, and killing. The camp displayed the classic features of formal organization: hierarchy of command, division of labor, standardized sequences of service and schedule, codes of discipline for personnel and inmates, and a high degree of bureaucratic record keeping. Like any larger origination, the concentration camp needed a specialized staff for administration of surveillance. The tasks were performed by the camp SS and also “self admistered” by the inmates. The advantages in power that accrue to formal origination are familiar. Such organization provides constancy, discipline, predictability, rationalization of work, and social control. Above all, formalization vitiates the need for high standards in the recruitment of personnel. Without forfeiting effectiveness, the organization can make do with quite mediocre individuals.

Nonetheless, the organization of the concentration camp should not be equated with that of military units or bureaucratic civil agencies. The SS was an organized “movement,” a party-affiliated formation regarded by the top echelon as the motor of expansion and terror. A rigid bureaucracy would only have stood in its way. Formalization did not achieve the degree of objectivity of a traditional administrative apparatus, in which set rules are binding on all. The SS bureaucracy was permeated by corruption and protection, rivalries and comradeship. One should not underestimate the extent of the delegation of power, local autonomy, and spontaneous improvisation. From its members, the SS demanded individual initiative, not blind obedience, flexible “operations,” not orders followed to the letter; it was faithful to the principle that competence is won by those who act. Independence and personal allegiance, along with correct accounting, were always demanded of its members, right down to the lowest levels of personnel. This diminished power by calculation, but intensified it via uncertainty and disorder by design. Personalized organization unleashed the impulse of arbitrariness on which terror is predicated. The SS issued an impenetrable thicket of rules and regulations that no inmate could ever follow in their entirety, and which could be employed by the guard personnel arbitrarily. The formal rules did not limit power, hedging it in, but rather provided the freedom of terror with an institutional underpinning.

Second, absolute power is the absolute power to label. It upends the relationship between class and social classification, turning it on its head. By defining a taxonomy of categories into which every prisoner was pigeonholed, it created a social structure that regulated the distribution of goods, privileges, and prestige. This practical schematism absorbed social stereotypes, radicalizing them in the process; it ordered the social field, heightening social, political, national, and racial differences among the inmates. The use of the class hierarchy was a strategy of graded discrimination, persecution, and annihilation. The ultimate value in this pecking order was the worth a person’s life was accorded. That value sign was sewn to an individual’s clothing, visible for all to see, a stigmatic patch.

The system of identification badges had immediate material effects. It was decisive in determining who was allowed to exercise power as a prisoner functionary, who was granted temporary protection, who was exposed to ruinous, ravaging labor, what rations a prisoner received. Labeling was a procedure that aided distribution. It regulated the distribution of misery, the dissemination of wretchedness. Thus, a prisoner society arose marked by variable distances between the classes, a differentiated, sharply stratified system, with extreme contrasts between bottom and top, and minimal

transitions between levels. With the aid of categories, power implemented its model of society. It branded its victims with stigmata, guiding the prisoners' behavior by its stamp.

Third, absolute power is graduated power. It sets up a cleverly devised system of collaboration by turning some victims into accomplices, outfitting the functionary elite with substantial authority. One of the pillars holding up the camp system was an auxiliary force of Kapos (prisoner-functionaries who supervised prisoner work squads, or Kommandos) and "scribes" (Schreiber, record-keepers) who helped maintain everyday routines and relieved the burden on the SS personnel. Through their agency, absolute power became omnipresent. It filled almost every cranny, every niche in the camp. Without that delegation of power, the system of discipline and surveillance would quickly have collapsed. The attendant rivalry for positions in supervision, administration, and supply provided the SS with a welcome opportunity to play the various factions among the prisoners' elite off against one another, keeping them dependent. However, the typical prisoner was at the mercy of a dual authority: the members of the SS, who hardly ever appeared in the camp, and the prisoner-functionaries (Funktionshafilinge), who were always around, a ubiquitous presence.

Delegation of power plugs the gaps in power and condenses control. Yet simultaneously, it creates certain free spaces, pockets of latitude. In order to active accomplices, the SS had to put up with developments it could not keep track of, taking them into the bargain. It had to concede opportunities for action that could be used by a minority of un-corruptible functionaries to the advantage of their fellow prisoners and to save lives. The delegation of power punctured the line dividing the SS from the prisoner elite. As a consequence of corruption, individual SS members became dependent on their confederates among the prisoners. Nonetheless, the camp regime did not forfeit any of its surfeit of power. Gradation of power does not diminish absolute power; it enhances it. The pressure of annihilation made the prisoner functionaries into accomplices of the system. Terror became for them a means of self-preservation. They were thus faced with an unresolvable dilemma. In order to avoid being hurled back into misery or lynched by their fellow prisoners, these inmates had to proffer their services to the center of power. On the other hand, assistance was impossible without first becoming an accessory. Even if the accomplices wished to protect their comrades, they had to become representatives of the regime, rejecting numerous requests from fellow prisoners for help, implementing the requisite discipline even by violence if necessary.

Fourth, absolute power sheds the ideological constraints of legitimation. Power would not be absolute if it had to justify itself. To be sure, the SS leadership was also pursuing goals motivated by race ideology when it set up the camps: the incarceration of all social outsiders, the destruction of the Jews and everyone the regime defined as "superfluous." However, equally important for the SS were goals that sprung chiefly from an interest in the maintenance and augmentation of power: the suppression of political opponents, the elimination of potential resistance, the intimidation of the population and dissemination of terror in the occupied territories. The rationale for police security, the prophylactic expansion of the camp system in the event of war, the locating of camps on or near factory grounds, the search for conscripted workers—all these had little to do with ideology.

In any case, to link what was actually happening inside the system—the motivational structure propelling the perpetrators and the dynamics of excessive power—to ideology is unconvincing. Ideologies serve to legitimate. They are intended to coach the subjected toward voluntary subservience—an objective that was pointless and unnecessary in the camps. In addition, legitimations

persuade those in power, if they should be plagued by any doubts, that their actions are correct. But all this was irrelevant in the camps. The camp SS was anything but an ideologically schooled unit. None of the commandants viewed the concentration camp primarily in terms of a historical mission. They were careerists, technocrats, corrupt criminals, assiduous subordinates. Some of the thugs may have been incited to commit atrocities on the spur of a malicious harangue. But most of the camp personnel were neither racist fanatics nor sadistic monsters. They used the opportunity to land themselves secure positions, gain social recognition, or avoid being sent to the front. During the war, thousands of soldiers deemed unfit for combat were put in the Waffen-SS (elite military units of the SS); Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) from the East or foreigners were recruited into the SS ranks who were unable to grasp its ideology simply because they spoke hardly a word of German. It is difficult to demonstrate that the SS guards and warders were imbued with the elite consciousness propagated by the SS leadership. Moreover, the everyday routine in the concentration camps was not determined by what the camp leadership occasionally proclaimed as an ideological goal. A different set of qualities was required: allegiance to duty, a knack for organization and getting things done, a sense of comradeship—and the readiness to use violence.°

Absolute power is self-based; not a means to an end, but an end in itself. Power that must legitimate itself is a weak mode of power. The conventional view of power is that it must always seek legitimation as a kind of shield. But organized terror was enough for the camp regime. It is totally mistaken to apply the yardstick of legitimation to the organization of the concentration camp. And it is a grave methodological error to project the substantial need for interpretation back into the era: to assume that the culprits had the same problems of explanation in flagrante delicto that they had later on in the dock before a tribunal. To whom would they have had to legitimate their actions? Many atrocities were committed quite matter-of-factly, even casually. Terror does not need to justify itself. Its basis is fear, an anxiety that it unceasingly generates. It is its own objective, self-contained. It proves itself by the act of its own exercise. And it remains effective by constant intensification, by self-exponentiation. Absolute power does not obey the pattern of purposeful. Result-oriented action. It is purposeless; not poiesis, but negative praxis. Ideology here is not just superfluous, but obstructive. It ties power to certain aims, degrading it to a mere instrument. Terror that allowed itself to be guided by aims and purposes would be calculable. It would no longer be terror. To take recourse in ideology is a false interpretation *post festum*, nourished by the mistaken belief that there always has to be an intellectual reason, that everything has some historical meaning.

Fifth, absolute power transforms the significance of human labor. Labor in the camp should not be confused with forced labor. In forced labor, coercion is an instrument of work, but labor in the camp was a means of oppression, an instrument of terror. It was meant to humiliate, to torment, to break the power of the inmates to resist, to drain and destroy them. Anyone who employs forced laborers or slaves has a certain interest in preserving their physical strength. They are fed, clothed, and housed so as to be able to regain their strength, to husband their energy. By contrast, labor in the camp sapped the life energy of the prisoners totally, irretrievably. The economy of the concentration camps was an economy of waste, the squandering of human labor power. Personnel there had little interest in the reproduction of that power, despite contrary instructions during the phase of the total war economy. The prisoners did not work in order to produce. They labored in order to die.

Undeniably, camp labor also met economic goals. Prisoners had to construct the camps and maintain them by internal effort. Building materials were extracted from the stone quarries; on the

moors, barren land was cultivated. The prisoners labored for SS firms, for countless private companies, and for the armaments projects of the interministerial *Sonderstdbe* (“special staffs” There were orders to maintain the labor power of the inmates in order to transform the camps into economical slave-labor camps. I do not intend to dispute these facts. But the goal of economic effectiveness was not seriously pursued until the final phase of the war, after all the reserve armies of foreign forced laborers had been exhausted. That shift ultimately foundered on the praxis of terror common in the camps. The working and living conditions of the inmates contradicted any notion of economic rationality. There was no need to worry about the preservation of a prisoner's labor power. Right from the start, the objective relation of labor was dominated by the relation of power. Absolute power is always able to abandon any rationale of economic utility and devalue human labor power. Its economic universe differs fundamentally from that of capitalist rationality and efficiency. It is an economy of strain, harassment, sovereign waste, drudgery, grind, and torture. Absolute power strips labor of its productiveness, liberating its destructive properties. Terror does not aim at exploitation but at ruination, the process of suffering, destruction for its own sake. Emaciation, depletion of strength, death—that is the victory of power over human beings.

Sixth, absolute power is total. It cancels the deadly symmetry of absolute violence: the ability of each to kill the other. In the state of nature, the power of one person to kill ends where the power of the next begins. Even slaves can reverse the violence perpetrated against them by their masters, directing it against those masters—or against themselves. For that reason, complete power over life and death is always incomplete.’ This is attested by the most radical forms of resistance, namely assassination and martyrdom. The assassin reestablishes the equality of the power to kill by proving that the master is mortal. Martyrs take their own deaths upon themselves, demonstrating that no one can force them to remain alive and complaisantly accept subjugation. But absolute power abrogates this antinomy of complete power. Assassinations were virtually impossible in the camps. There simply were no means and no weapons; there was insufficient physical strength. Individual acts of counter violence would not have changed anything; moreover, they would have triggered extreme mass reprisals.*

Martrydom was just as rare. The only groups that could, with a certain justification, properly be labeled martyrs were the dedicated political resistance fighters and the Jehovah's Witnesses. The latter, persecuted for their conscientious objection to military service, were adamant in their determination not to renounce their basic beliefs. Among the other categories of prisoners, none could have saved themselves by disavowal, renouncing some specific conviction or other. People were not incarcerated and killed on account of their religious beliefs, but because they had been stigmatized as superfluous. Even suicide, that ultimate and final act of self-determination, was systematically denied to the prisoners. It is true that there were repeated instances of suicide in the camps, but the attempt to kill oneself was punished by draconian measures. Whoever tried to reach the electrically charged death fence was shot or taken into custody. That prisoner then had more to fear than mere death. Absolute power cannot brook suicide. The decision to take one’s own life is an offense, an insult it cannot permit.

Seventh, the most direct form of absolute power is sheer violence. It demonstrates its overwhelming might by manifest violence. Absolute power in action does not issue threats; it injures, maims, and kills. In no way is violence a sign of weakness. Power in the camps was not a system of rule that ultimately used violence after all other means had proved ineffective—as a last resort. Systems of rule generally are quite frugal in the way they employ violence, since it creates disorder and threatens the consent of the subjugated. In this regard, absolute power is fundamentally different. Violence and

cruelty are the essence of its terror. In this way, it demonstrates the permanent vulnerability of the subjugated, and its own complete power of destruction over human life.

The camp was a laboratory of violence. Absolute power in action liberates a perpetrator from all inhibitions; cruelty comes unhinged. Virtually anything can be ventured, repeated, intensified, or halted. Without reference to norms or goals. Absolute freedom is imbued here with a barbaric ingenuity. Its paradigms are not public execution, the calculated torture of interrogation, or the regulated punishment of transgressions; rather, its models are terror punishment, excess, and massacre. The motives for violence in the camps were manifold. Many deeds were perpetrated on the basis of a momentary mood or lark, a sense of boredom, during a contest, or because a person wanted to pocket a few cigarettes as a reward. Side by side with sadistic aggression stand habitual tormenting, indifferent killing, collective massacre under the influence of alcohol, or killing under specific orders. However, in the case of excessive violence, another factor is decisive. Excess is not a punishment, not an instrument of punitive power. In any event, it seeks grounds and reasons after the fact. But excess provides the perpetrator with a distinctive sense of self-esteem. It vaults all internal and external barriers. By making the victim into a defenseless body and ultimately into a nonreactive object, the culprits gain the certainty that they are capable of anything, any outrage. Excess is an act of uninhibited self-expansion,’ one that simultaneously extinguishes sociality. Cruelty wishes from its victims nothing further.'° In the execution of violence, the perpetrator loses interest in time. This accounts for the rapid averting of attention after the deed. Absolute power in action does not aim at subjugation. All it wishes to achieve is fear and terror for its own sake; all it seeks to demonstrate is how it can obliterate the human being as a personal and social being.

The end point of violence is killing. Killing is the total victory over the other. It is the emblem of absolute superiority. Violence cannot be further intensified beyond this terminus. Death is frequently the final, albeit cryptic reference point of permanent domination. However, the power to kill and the powerless fear of death were not latent determinants of the social relations in the camp. Killing was ever-present, predominant in the camp's everyday round, supreme. It was no exception; it was rank normality, routine. The power to kill turned prisoner society into a provisional society.

Eighth, absolute power engenders absolute powerlessness. Most prisoners lived in constant fear of death. None could be certain of surviving until the next day. The unquestioned idealization of one’s own continued existence, on which all action is based, was shattered. It was uncertain whether action still had any effect, whether conformity and obedience actually helped prolong one’s life. Absolute power turns every situation into one of life or death. It can foil any plan of action. The continuity of internal time-consciousness is fractured; past and future are radically devalued. The prisoner existed in an eternal yet irregularly pulsating present, an endless duration that was constantly inter rupted by sudden attacks and incursions. In this world of terror, a single day was longer than a week.

As a consequence of the pressure to annihilate, there was a merciless struggle in the camp for sheer survival. Misery does not weld people together; it rends the fabric of reciprocity. The dominant social structure of powerlessness is the serially ordered and coerced mass. In that mass, every person is one too many. Although there were harsh penalties, one prisoner stole the last crumb of bread from the next. On the black market, prisoners bartered their last belongings in exchange for food, at the mercy of the profiteers who controlled prices. Inmates “sold themselves” into service to “prominent” prisoners, fulfilling their every wish in order to benefit somehow from their advantages. Whoever could still

muster some modicum of strength was constantly involved in "organizing" something: a piece of cardboard for protection from the cold, or a chunk of wood that could be burned down to charcoal to treat the unrelenting diarrhea that sprung from the hunger ravaging one's bowels. In extreme distress, almost everything can be used somehow. Self-preservation demanded ceaseless activity, caution, and unscrupulousness. Mutual emergency assistance, acts of solidarity, and personal contacts had to be wrenched laboriously from the serial isolation forced on the prisoners. The society of the concentration camp was not a social community. Absolute power hurls humans into a social state of nature, a Hobbesian universe of theft and bribery, mistrust and animosity, the struggle of all against all.

In the face of the absolute power to kill, sheer survival is already an act of resistance. What would be considered secondary adjustment in total institutions was a naked struggle for survival in the camps.'' This also included those acts of resistance aimed directly at the camp regime: the organizing of escapes, the provision of information, the puncturing of isolation, sabotage at work. But resistance ran up against a critical boundary. Absolute power destroys the causal nexus between action and survival. The ultimate fate of prisoners did not depend on their own actions. Only a minute fraction managed to escape. The others survived only because the Gestapo released them or the liberators arrived in time.'* Absolute power gives the lie to the familiar notion that a human being's survival lies in his own hands.

Ninth, absolute power eradicates the line of demarcation between life and death." Before their deaths, persons were destroyed gradually, step by step. The production of "living skeletons" is one of the genuine inventions of the concentration camp. Persons were starved, emaciated, left to the merciless rage of epidemics. Many died not as a result of direct physical violence, but because of systematic infliction of misery. This indirect annihilation did not kill immediately; it allowed death time. Power created an intermediate sphere, a state of misery and sickness between life and death. In this limbo, the perpetrators could find countless victims when they desired to act. The mass dying transformed the camp into a field of the dead. But even when all the prisoners perished within the course of a year, new transports assured the preservation of the power system of the camp. Their ranks were replenished.

The leading figure in the cast of mass dying was the *Muselmann* ("Moslem"; Auschwitz jargon for the "walking dead"), the human being in the process of dissolution. He or she symbolizes the anthropological transformation of a human being under the conditions of camp existence. No longer capable of anything but mechanical reactions, the *Muselmann* was trapped in a state of mental agony and social abandonment. The physical, bodily unity of the per is integrated; intellect, spirit, and consciousness succumbed to a kind of inner sclerosis. The soul self-destructed, collapsing into total apathy and torpor. The person lost all ability to act. Although a victim of hunger and misery, the *Muselmann* was despised by the other inmates, kicked and beaten, ultimately left to his or her own devices, or killed. In this way, survivors protected themselves from the menacing visage of their own fate. Before physical expiration, the *Muselmann* died a death that was social.

Finally, absolute power aims at its own aggrandizement. It operates under the compulsion of totality. Its end is not reached until there are no longer any exceptions. If it abandoned this objective, it would relinquish itself. Power is total when it can multiply the numbers of its victims, killing indiscriminately. Killing succors power. Power perpetuates itself by means of the victims off of which it lives. Its excesses generate the need for ever-greater excesses. Each dead corpse enhances the power over the survivors. By contrast, however, the survivors constitute an affront to all-pervading power. It is

no accident that there were especially cruel excesses in the wake of unsuccessful attempts at killing. Power's hatred is directed against anyone who survives after the others have been killed. The complete subjects of power are*those it has eradicated.'* It cannot, on principle, tolerate any survivors whatsoever. The greatest proof of power is the mass grave, the camp as a field of the dead. However, total power here cancels itself. Death is the absolute antisocial fact. For that reason, the absolute power to kill can never become total. In order to escape this dilemma, it constantly searches out new victims, defining new groups of opponents. Everyone is on terror's proscription list—extended to its logical conclusion, all of humankind.

Mass murder demands organization. Absolute power exceeds the threshold of excess and starvation at the point at which it transforms killing into work. Repeated killing is not a deed, a single act, but an activity with all the distinguishing features of work: a task done methodically, according to plan, over time, oriented to a goal, marked by bureaucratic efficiency and routine. Killing was centralized spatially, coordinated and standardized in its sequencing; it was functionally divided into segments, and technologically based to a limited extent. The victims of the killing stations in the concentration camps and "death factories" were nothing but an anonymous series. They were killed row by row. "Industrial" genocide, the factory like annihilation of the Jews, transformed human beings into "material," "raw material" that was "exploited," and whose residua were disposed of without a trace. The system of absolute power reached its apogee in the death factories of Auschwitz and Treblinka.

The concept of absolute power provides a guide for the sociological investigation of the concentration camp. The chapters below analyze in detail the domains of this power and the structures over which it assumes control. After a brief overview in chapter 3 tracing the history of the German concentration camp system, part 2 deals initially with the ordering of space and time. Absolute power defines social zones; it distributes persons in space and guides their movements (chapter 4). It erects a controlled space with insurmountable boundaries (chapter 5) and with sites of extreme density (chapter 6). In the daily round of camp routine, it establishes a social standard time, yet it extends and interrupts this time arbitrarily (chapter 7). Absolute power is not content merely with the creation of a system of social time. It penetrates into internal time-consciousness, disrupting the relationships among past, present, and future. By this skewing of time, it destroys identity, one's relationship with oneself (chapter 8).

Part 3 focuses on the social structures that power engenders and on which it relies for support. The social field of the concentration camp is divided into three domains: the world of the personnel (chapter 9), the aristocracy among the prisoners (chapters 11 and 12), and the mass society of inmates, with its system of classes and categories (chapters 10 and 13). Each of these regions had its typical social forms that must be looked at separately. The forms of association range from the personalized organization of the SS and the graduated protection of the functional elite to illegal relations of exchange and barter, serially structured massification, and total dissociation. The system of terror altered the various states of the social world; it guided and penetrated them, crushing their aggregation at the first signs of counterpower.

Part 4 addresses work in the concentration camp, focusing initially on the question of whether prisoner labor can legitimately be viewed as slave labor (chapter 14). Although many offices and enterprises profited from the labor of the prisoners (chapter 15), work was determined by a relation of power that fundamentally transmuted the character of human labor. Absolute power reigns in the work

situation (chapter 16), intensifying the burden of labor to the level of an extreme annihilatory pressure. It destroys the purposeful structure of activities, transforming work into a means of constant torment and gradual destruction.

Part 5 explores the indirect annihilation of human beings by the systematic infliction of misery (chapters 17 and 18), and the forms of violence and killing that are unleashed by absolute power. The camp regime turned sanctions into brutal terror punishment (chapter 19), intensifying violence to the level of excessive cruelty (chapter 20). In the end, it magnified its lethal power by means of organization, imbuing that power with permanence in the enterprise of selection (chapter 21) and the death factories (chapter 22). Although initiated from the outside, the factory like mass annihilation was in keeping with the internal dynamics of a system of power and terror bent on its own totalistic fulfillment.

IoT Geofencing for COVID-19 Enforcement



Now ask yourself again.

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